The University of Alberta Department of Music presents:

Music at Convocation Hall

Visiting Artist

Catherine Vickers, piano

Wednesday, October 1, 2008
7:15 pm Pre-Concert Talk by Dr Howard Bashaw
8:00 pm Concert
Convocation Hall, Arts Building, University of Alberta

DEPARTMENT OF
MUSIC
UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Program

3 Klavierstueke, D946 (1828) — Franz Schubert (1797–1828)
- Allegro assai
- Allegretto
- Allegro

...sofferte onde serene... (1976/77) for piano and tape — Luigi Nono (1924–1990)

Intermission

Disappearances (1995) — Nicolaus A Huber (b. 1939)

24 Preludes, Op28 (1836-39) — Frédéric Chopin (1810–1849)

Agitato, Lento, Vivace, Largo, Allegro molto, Lento assai, Andantino, Molto agitato, Largo, Molto allegro, Vivace, Presto, Lento, Allegro, Sostenuto, Presto con fuoco, Allegretto, Allegro molto, Vivace, Largo, Cantabile, Molto agitato, Moderato, Allegro appassionato

Program Notes
by Andrea Eng

Franz Schubert (1797 - 1828)

Franz Schubert was born in Vienna in January of 1797 and began his musical studies ay home, first on violin (with his father), and later on piano (with his brother). At the age of eight he was offered a position as a singer in the choir of the imperial Hofkapelle that granted him entry into the prestigious Kaiserlich-königliches Stadkonvikt (Imperial and Royal City College). His first surviving compositions date from this time in his life, in particular his first published work, the *Fantasie in G* for piano duet (1810).

During his late teens, Schubert became enamoured with the poetry of the German Romantic poets such as Goethe, Körner, Hölty, and Kosegarten (to name but a few) and he began setting many of their poems to music at what now seems an almost superhuman pace. In these years he wrote some of his most beloved Lieder, including *Ganymede* (1817), *Die Forelle* (1817), and *An die Musik* (1817).

There is no record of Schubert ever having owned a piano of his own, an unusual situation for a composer of such fluidity and involvement in works for piano. For composition and performance, he seems only to have used pianos belonging to friends, family, and benefactors. Unlike many of the innovative compositions for piano by many of his contemporaries, Schubert's piano music is indeed composed for a very generic instrument, and does not use the extremes of the keyboard or have many markings for pedal. Such advances in the piano itself were only just becoming popular in Vienna in the early years of the nineteenth century. Regardless, in addition to the hundreds of Lieder, Schubert finished twelve piano sonatas (with another nine left unfinished), hundreds of waltzes and ländler, and numerous short, self-contained single-movement solo piano pieces such as the *Drei Klavierstücke*, written in late 1828, but unpublished until a full 40 years after his death, in 1868.

All three of the *Drei Klavierstücke* begin with a rush and intensity in the piano that easily creates a sense of urgency, but changes in a second section, each one into a different and distinct mood. All three are all reminiscent of the dance music that was so popular in Vienna at the time. The first piece, in E-Flat minor, establishes a rhythm of seemingly unrelenting triplets that build in intensity, and that allow select longer notes of the melodic line come to the fore. Schubert also uses silence to his advantage in this work, as long unexpected rests instill a feeling of anticipation that drives the movement forward. This intensity frames a restful section in which time seems suspended in the key of B Major. The second piece, in E-flat major, begins with a calm 6/8 melody, in quiet contrast to the gallop of the previous E-flat minor piece. The calm mood is ultimately interrupted by a quiet but incredibly intense, broken octave rhythm in the bass, under flurries of turns and accented chords in the treble and flavoured with unexpected chromaticism and dissonance. Schubert moves the through various keys before closing with a brief return to the materials of the calm opening section. The third piece starts much like the first, bright and intense in mood, but here in C major. As in the previous two pieces, Schubert introduces a contrasting section in which time seems to come to a standstill, here in a 3/2 metre and using an ostinato pattern of long–long–short–short chords. A melodic diversion in the treble brings the music back to the brightness and intensity of the opening and marking a close to the work as a whole.

Luigi Nono (1924 – 1990)

Luigi Nono was born in January of 1924 in Venice, Italy and studied composition at the Venice Conservatory from 1943 to 1945. Beginning in the summer of 1950, Nono became a regular participant in the summer classes at Darmstadt, first as a student of Edgar

Varèse, Pierre Boulez, and Karlheinz Stockhausen, and then (after 1957) as a teacher. As a result of his experiences during WWII, Nono became intensely involved in left–wing politics and the socialist movement in Italy, becoming a member of the Italian Communist Party in 1952. His political views are paralleled in his compositions, in which sounds and text are inextricably linked. Much of his work includes, or is exclusively composed for, electronic instruments as Nono began to find that the sounds and emotions he wished his music to evoke were not available to him using traditional acoustic means; his desire for drastic social change is reflected in this sudden shift in compositional material. This is demonstrated most effectively in a groundbreaking stage work *Intolleranza 1960* (completed in 1961), which was Nono's response to the racial intolerance, fascist violence, and exploitation he had witnessed.

Beginning in 1960, Nono retreated to the RAI Studio Fonologia in Milan to begin working almost exclusively with electronics both for composition and performance. In this period he drew heavily on socialist texts for his works, including texts written by Fidel Castro, Che Guevara, Karl Marx, and Malcolm X to name a few. The *Musica–manifeto no. 1* (1968), for example, uses material collected from Paris student protests of that same year.

...sofferte onde serene... (1976) was written for and dedicated to Nono's close friend, pianist Maurizio Pollini, and takes into consideration this performer's specific style and musical individuality in interpretation. This work, whose title can be translated as 'serene waves endured', was inspired by the feelings of loss (through death) that both Nono and Pollini had recently experienced in their respective families. In Nono's notes about the piece he writes that this common experience brought them even closer as friends "...in the sadness of the infinite smile of 'sofferte onde serene'..." Scored for piano and two-channel tape, this work has very detailed instructions for the placement of four speakers, two directly under the piano body and two facing out into the room. The sounds from the two speakers under the piano are intended to affect the sounds of the piano itself. The sounds from the tape are created by the pianist, pre-recorded, and are to be played in tandem with the live performer. These two aesthetics, live and pre-recorded, blend together to create in performance the "serene waves" of Nono's title.

Nicolaus A. Huber (b. 1939)

Nicolaus Huber was born in 1939 in Passau, Germany. He studied music composition in Munich with Günter Bialas from 1964-1967, with Karlheinz Stockhausen in Darmstadt in 1967, and – most significantly, from his own perspective – with Luigi Nono in Venice from 1967 to 1968. In 1969 Huber accepted a teaching position at the Folkswang-Hochschule in Essen, where he remained until his retirement in 2003. Like his mentor Luigi Nono, Huber was well read and closely involved with left-wing politics in both Germany and South America, and this invariably impacted his compositions.

Huber's works and lengthy compositional career can be divided into four major periods: a first phase (from the early- to late-1960s) where he sought a purification of musical language from the meaning forced upon it by middle-class traditions as well as a rejection of serialism due to its disconnect with the natural human behaviour patterns; a second phase (1969 to the mid-1980s) is marked by his growing activity in socialist politics and thus combines with his ideals of a purified musical material with progressive and social critique within the music; a third phase (from the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s) is when Huber began reflecting on canonized music material with a modern perspective, an example of which is his *Air mit 'Sphinxes'* (1987) which is a reflection on 'Sphinxes' from Robert Schumann's *Carnaval*; his further creative period began in the mid-1990s.

Disappearances was completed in 1995 and, like other works of this period, is characterized by a radicalization of Huber's concept of aural predictability. Both of the thirds and fourth phases of his compositional career are similar in their sources of

intellectual material for musical inspiration and also in their use of compositional ideas that portray the almost bittersweet tone of Huber's politically-aware post-modernism. *Disappearances* explores the concept of sounds being absorbed or disappearing into one another. Here Huber plays with the physical capabilities of the piano and asks: "What does the piano make from and after the touch of the pianist?" How does barely audible sound influence and colour a principal one? And how does becoming absorbed into (or disappearing into) one sound lead the listening away from the rhythm of each subsequent note's moment of attack? Huber also used two poems as source inspiration for the work, 'The *Zeitgeist*' by Scardanelli, and Paul Celan's *Tenebrae*. While the first poem lends itself as an over-arching theme for the work, the second poem, full of human and political bitterness, can be experienced particularly in the recitative like 'trilling' towards the end of the work. This moment seems to intone the words that Huber feels are recited by those human beings who are lost to the inhumanity, torture, and madness of conflict and war:

To the drinking-trough we went, Lord.
It was blood,
it was the blood that was spilt from you.
It glistened.
It threw your image into our eyes, Lord.
Eyes and mouth stand so open and empty,
Lord.
We have drunk, Lord.
The blood and the image
that was in the blood, Lord.
Pray, Lord.
We are near.

Excerpt from *Tenebrae*

Frédéric Chopin (1810 – 1849)

Frédéric François Chopin was born in Warsaw, Poland in 1810 to a French father and Polish mother. Recognized as a child prodigy (his first surviving composition was a *Polonaise* written when he was only seven years old), Chopin studied piano and composition privately before entering into the High School of Music in 1826. In 1829, he toured Europe, settling in Paris in 1831 and establishing himself as a piano teacher, performer, and composer. A prolific composer over a very short life, his work is almost exclusively for the piano.

Today, Chopin's work is so entrenched in the instructional canon it is rare for a young pianist to make it through any sort of formal piano study without coming across at least one piano etude or piano prelude by Chopin, if not more. In fact, the set of 24 preludes on today's program was composed between 1838 and 1839 for exactly that reason: as instructional tools. Unlike other pedagogical studies, however, each of these preludes focuses on musical elements of performance rather than merely technical ones, as an etude will tend to do. Of these twenty-four, few last more than two minutes, and some merely half a minute. And yet each of these short works – one in each of the twenty-four major and minor keys – is satisfyingly complete unto itself.

The preludes include some of Chopin's most original ideas, using dissonances uncommon in their day, and incorporating an exceptional textural density for such short works. Both individually and as a group, these preludes even caused a forward thinking and

sympathetic composer and critic like Robert Schumann to comment on their difficulty as "... all disorder and confusion." One of the most difficult challenges of playing the entire set of preludes is making the wide range of keys, moods, tempi, and dispositions found in each of these individual pieces cohere as a whole work.

Catherine Vickers

Catherine Vickers was born in Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada and studied in Edmonton, Alberta before going to Europe on a Canada Council grant to further her studies in Germany.

Because of the very diverse backgrounds of her teachers, her playing draws from the principals of the rich traditions of the schools of Franz Liszt, Leopold Godowsky and Arthur Schnabel.

By "unanimous decision of the jury", she was awarded the Busoni Prize and Gold Medal at the *Concorso Pianistico Internazionale F. Busoni* and was also a prize winner at the Sydney International Piano Competition.

After many years of teaching as a professor at the Folkwang-University in Essen, Germany, the artist was appointed Professor at the University of Music and the Performing Arts in Frankfurt am Main, Germany.

Catherine Vickers concertizes in Asia, Europe, North and South America. Her extensive repertoire includes standard and avantgardistic works fo the piano literature (as in two special CD productions - "Waltzes throughout the 20th Century" AM 1363-2 and "Nicolaus A. Huber - Complete Works for Piano" Koch Schwann Aulos 3 - 1817 - 2.)

She is a regular guest at International festivals (also at festivals for contemporary music in Montréal, Munich, Darmstadt, Ghent, etc). She is artistic director of the festival *Piano+-Music for Piano and Electronics* in Karlsruhe, Germany and has held master classes at international courses such as the Summer Academy Mozarteum Salzburg, Varna Sumemr Festival, March Music days, Rousse, Akoyoshidai - Japan, Euro Festival Korea, Musicalp Courchevel, Schloss Heiligenberg, etc. Her many artistic activities also include serving as a jury member at numerous international piano and chamber music competitions.

Piano Masterclass – October 2, 3:30-5:30 pm
Convocation Hall, Arts Building
Free admission

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